

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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USIA-06 IO-10 OMB-01 AID-05 FDRE-00 /071 W

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P R 051132Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4806

INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 4342

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJECT: INITIAL REACTIONS TO PRESIDENT THIEU'S SPEECH

REF: SAIGON 4281

1. PRESIDENT THIEU'S APRIL 4 ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED IN A STRONG AND FORCEFUL FASHION WITH SEVERAL POINTS AT WHICH THE PRESIDENT EXHIBITED EMOTION IN DISCUSSING THE EVENTS OF THE RECENT NVA OFFENSIVE. THE SPEECH WAS A MUCH MORE DETAILED AND FRANKER EXPLANATION OF EVENTS THAN ANYTHING OFFERED BY THE GOVERNMENT SINCE THE INITIATION OF THE OFFENSIVE.

2. WE THINK THOSE VIETNAMESE SEEKING REASSURANCE AND LEADERSHIP FROM PRESIDENT THIEU, AND MANY HAVE BEEN LONGING FOR THIS, FOUND THE SPEECH REASSURING AND WELCOMED IT AFTER THE PRESIDENT'S LONG SILENCE. ON THE OTHER HAND THE DECLINE OF CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD AND DEEP. THIS SPEECH WAS PROBABLY A GOOD FIRST STEP TOWARDS CHECKING THIS DECLINE BUT WE THINK FEW OF THOSE WHO ARE IN THE RANKS OF THE OPPOSITION HAVE CHANGED THEIR POSITION ON THE STRENGTH OF THIS ADDRESS.

3. WE HAVE HEARD COMMENTS ON THE SPEECH BY ABOUT TWELVE

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VIETNAMESE, INCLUDING MILITARY MEN AND PRO-GOVERNMENT AND

OPPOSITION POLITICIANS. REACTIONS THAT WE HEARD TENDED TO REFLECT THE VIEWPOINT OF THE LISTENER. THUS, SOME FOUND PRESIDENT THIEU'S RELATIVELY FULL EXPLANATION OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THE HIGH-LANDS TO BE BELIEVABLE AND VERY WELCOME. OTHERS CRITICIZED THE FACT THAT PRESIDENT THIEU LAID A GOOD MEASURE OF THE BLAME FOR THE DEBACLE ON LOCAL COMMANDERS AND FAILED TO ADMIT ANY FAILURE ON HIS OWN PART. SOME DOUBTED HIS ASSERTIONS THAT THE ARVN WOULD RETURN EVENTUALLY TO THE LOST TERRITORIES.

4. NO EMBASSY CONTACTS, SO FAR, HAVE DISAGREED WITH PRESIDENT THIEU'S CRITICISM OF THE US FAILURE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE MILITARY AID TO REPLACE THAT EXPENDED BY THE ARVN IN GVN'S DEFENSE. SOME HAVE STRONGLY WELCOMED THE INCLUSION OF THIS MATERIAL IN THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH.

5. A COMMON REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S CALL UPON LOWER HOUSE SPEAKER NGUYEN BA CAN TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN TO WELCOME THE DEPARTURE OF PRIME MINISTER KHIEM BUT TO WONDER IF SPEAKER CAN WILL BE ADEQUATE TO THE TASK. LITTLE SPECIFIC CRITICISM HAS BEEN HEARD OF CAN, AND HIS ADMINISTRATIVE ABILITY HAS BEEN PRAISED, BUT CAN AS A NATIONAL LEADER IS CONSIDERED BY MOST TO BE A LIGHTWEIGHT.

6. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH CAME AFTER A LONG INTERVAL IN WHICH PEOPLE HAVE BECOME ALMOST DESPERATE FOR SOME OVERT SIGN OF LEADERSHIP FROM THEIR PRESIDENT. THE PRESSURES WHICH HAVE BUILT UP AGAINST PRESIDENT THIEU SURELY REMAIN VERY GREAT. THE SPEECH WAS A RELATIVELY GOOD ONE, HOWEVER, AND WILL NO DOUBT SERVE TO CONSOLIDATE SUCH SUPPORT AS PRESIDENT THIEU MAY STILL ENJOY. HIS CALL ON SPEAKER CAN TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT, FOLLOWING DIRECTLY ON THE APPOINTMENT OF BG HIEP AS THE NEW MINISTER OF INFORMATION, HARDLY ACCORDS WITH THE IDEA OF A FORMATION OF GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION HELD BY MOST OPPOSITION POLITICIANS, MODERATE OR RADICAL. THEY WILL SURELY VIEW CAN'S APPOINTMENT AS A SIGNAL THAT THE PRESIDENT CONTINUES TO INTEND TO EXERCISE HIMSELF PRE-EMINENT POWER WITHIN THE RVN. WHETHER, IN VIEW OF THE CRITICALITY OF THE CURRENT SITUATION, THE RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER KHIEM AND THE APPOINTMENT OF A CIVILIAN PRIME MINISTER WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO PERSUADE ANY IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION TO SERVE IN THE NEW CAN CABINET

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REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THE REACTION OF THE OPPOSITION IS, HOWEVER, NOT SO IMPORTANT AS THAT OF THE MILITARY AND THIS WE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE WITH ANY PRECISION.

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